

targeting our transgender family. Having been harassed like a raccoon in a trash can a few times, I've had police escorts and one show turned into a real protest. Other performers have their own tales. It's real."

— **Divine**,
producer,
Bearded Lady Productions

"I feel more safe downtown than at the start of the year due to increased police presence on the street and less unhoused people laying on the pavements."

— **Helen Hyatt**,
activist and *South Asheville resident*

"I feel as safe most places in Buncombe County as I did at the start of the year. What has changed for me are the steadily increasing crowds of people in downtown Asheville, especially during 'tourist season' and especially on weekends. Crowds of (occasionally inebriated) tourists juxtaposed with our homeless population is a recipe for trouble. But I grew up visiting Asheville starting in the 1970s, and downtown at night has always been edgy."

— **Terry Roberts**,
author

"Honestly, I feel no different than I did at the beginning of the year. 2023 felt like it had just started, then I blinked and we are about to be in 2024. So, no real noticeable change."

— **Xero Koffsky**,
junior at *Warren Wilson College*

"Our city continues to prosecute activists engaged in mutual aid with the 'felony littering' charges and arrest of journalists in Aston Park. We've increased surveillance with systems like Fusus and multiple new drones that hover over protests or even at a

local bookstore's opening. In a time when so many of our civil rights are under attack, criminalizing the ability to dissent is inherently unsafe."

— **Grace Barron-Martinez**,
activist and *Realtor*

Should addressing panhandling be a priority for local government?

"Panhandling is legal here in Asheville, although it is regulated. However, even after reading the regulations in their entirety twice, I'm still not 100% clear on where and when panhandling is allowed, so I wish the rules were a little more clear, and then it would be easier to determine whether or not the city is doing a good job enforcing the regulations."

— **Stu Helm**,
food blogger and food tour guide,
Stu Helm Food Fan

"I am not a fan of panhandling but I do not have a problem with it. There is a group of people that hang out at the 240 exit onto Haywood Road coming from downtown. They seem to have a system and are always polite and respectful. These people are not a problem. People that scream obscenities and follow you down a street, however, are a problem."

— **Lucious Wilson**,
board member,
*Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority*

"Yes. I view panhandling as a cry for help from our most vulnerable community. We must ensure our outreach is adapted to the various needs such as substance abuse, food and shelter. We must also be pragmatic — resources are needed to help support the many services that we provide for

the community. In doing so, we must use the laws we have available to enforce the violations and offer assistance when necessary. Enforcement is also needed to prevent bad actors (aka professional panhandlers) from taking advantage of the community."

— **Sandra Kilgore**,
Asheville vice mayor

"Addressing the source of panhandling should be the priority. Why are there so many homeless/houseless and dangerously addicted individuals in Asheville now, yet property taxes keep going up?"

— **Jax Hammond**,
creator, *Visit Asheville
(For Tourist and Locals!)*
and *Asheville Quarantine
Community Facebook groups*

"It should be addressed for the comfort and safety of both the panhandler and the citizens or tourists they are appealing to. I think people want to help, and perhaps there is a way to do so and get those resources in the hands of the folks who need the help so they would not have to stand along the side of the streets or highways and could be out of potential harm's way."

— **Billy Doubraski**,
*East West Asheville Neighborhood
Association board member*

"I've noticed a definite decrease in panhandling in the West Asheville area where my store is located since summer ended. We and our nearby neighbors chose to sign a petition to increase the watch of authorities, along with our addition of 'No Trespassing' signs. It's a joint effort from multiple neighboring businesses."

— **Morgan Albritton**,
owner, *Morgan's Comics*

Has community support for law enforcement changed since the start of 2023?

"There has definitely been a 'swing of the pendulum' from 2020 to 2023. We are no longer hearing cries to 'defund' or reduce the size of the Police Department. In fact, from our business community to our residential community — be they affluent or underserved — we are hearing requests for increased presence. I believe this indicates that confidence and trust are improving between APD and our community."

— **David Zack**,
former *Asheville Police Chief*,
2020-23

"I've seen an uptick in media reinforcement and public support for using arrests to address our housing crisis. Ample evidence shows this approach doesn't work and causes

harm, including greatly increasing how long people are on the streets. Personally, I know multiple people who lost upcoming housing due to the recent waves of nuisance crime arrests. Continuing to use the same broken tools we have been using only digs us deeper into the hole."

— **Pip Flickinger**,
outreach worker


"Recruitment and retention have been an acute challenge for the Asheville Police Department. The approval of a 6% salary increase for existing APD employees, a wellness incentive pilot program and additional pay for intermediate law enforcement certification has been met with great support by our community."

— **Esther Manheimer**,
Asheville mayor

"I've noticed the rise of local citizen groups, largely through social media, taking on a more conservative, combative tone to anyone critical of law enforcement. And these seem to be people who, at least before the Black Lives Matter protests, likely would have identified as liberal, or at least as Democratic Party voters. But these people have grown fearful and alarmed at the visible homelessness and mental illness on Asheville's streets, and they decry the loss of a romanticized version of Asheville they believe has disintegrated through liberal city leadership. I think this shift could probably be traced back to 2022 and perhaps even 2021, but it has certainly grown in 2023."

— **Matt Peiken**,
host,
"The Overlook with Matt Peiken"

"I think our community is paying closer attention to what practices keep our community safe. I appreciate our conversations with our neighbors and the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office's focus on prioritizing violent crime. I've also heard significant community support for our co-response efforts, so I believe we'll continue to see community support for effective law enforcement strategies and innovative approaches."

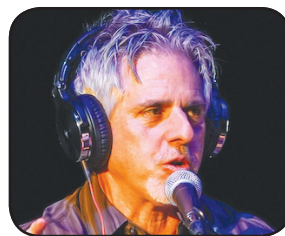
— **Martin Moore**,
Buncombe County commissioner 



MARTIN MOORE



ANDREW PAUL



MATT PEIKEN



TERRY ROBERTS



LUCIOUS WILSON



DAVID ZACK